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ABSTRACT

Presently there are nearly 20,000 undergraduate majors in broadcasting, with the majority enrolled in speech communication departments. However, estimates hold that at best only one-half of those seeking positions in television will actually find them. This indicates the need for a media student to receive a good general education in areas other than communication and to receive specific production/management training in nonbroadcast media. A nonbroadcast institutional media program should be founded on the study of basic communication and should provide training in methods of systematically analyzing alternative approaches to meeting specific behavioral objectives and of designing effective instructional and persuasive messages that make use of appropriate media. It should provide concentrated study of production principles and techniques through directed practice and drill in small-format television and synchronous sound/slide program preparation and should progressively increase student responsibility through full production management of all aspects of planning and execution. The program should also provide opportunities to supplement production courses with those in administration and management, technical operations and engineering, and performance; and should incorporate professional practices or internship opportunities for seniors in corporate or institutional settings. (HOD)

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CURRICULA WHICH MAXIMIZE THE MARKETABILITY
OF GRADUATES IN TELECOMMUNICATIONS: RADIO-TELEVISION-FILM

Central States Speech Association

Chicago, Illinois

April, 1981

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In the midst of my first year of teaching speech in radio broadcasting, when I was still in that naive state of expecting to find someone from whom I could get the magic formula which would resolve all the difficulties of the art, I visited one of the broadcasting centers. I was armed with a letter of introduction to an announcer who each evening intrigued people from coast to coast into buying his sponsor's product. The gentleman saw me. In the course of our conversation I questioned him as to what in his opinion could be taught in a college course in radio. His succinct answer: "Nothing." Realizing that the time for my departure had come, I left to ponder this pearl of great price with respect to myself and my activities.¹

Since 1937 when this description was written by H. Clay Harshbarger, then Professor of Speech at the State University of Iowa, education for broadcasting has grown from a few courses in 22 colleges and universities to a total of well over 6,000 radio and television courses in 230 four-year schools.² This proliferation may be dated from 1929, when the University of Southern California reportedly offered the first college course in radio.³

Presently there are nearly 20,000 undergraduate majors in broadcasting, with the majority enrolled in speech communication departments. Five-thousand seniors were graduated last year from those departments which reported these data in a national survey. According to the San Francisco Examiner, nine Bay Area colleges alone graduate 1000 new job-hunters every year, which helps explain why KGO Radio and Television, a local employer with about 50 openings a year, gets nearly 10,000 job applications.⁴ Estimates at best hold that only one-half of those seeking positions in television actually find them, "and they must be willing to take any position available, near and far."⁵

Clearly the number of students studying broadcasting is disproportionate to the size of the industry work force. Being so, it might be expected that the situation would right itself as the word filters down through our colleges and universities to the student. This, however, has not been the case. Studies indicate that broadcasting enrollments in speech departments alone have swelled by 560 percent in 25 years and this expansion is due principally to growth during the last decade, during which time enrollments have quadrupled.⁶ The job of maximizing the marketability of graduates in our discipline remains particularly difficult.

In this paper I will consider some of the ways that communication educators may help insure that graduates have the best possible chance of finding employment in media. More specifically, I will discuss the media student's need to receive a good general education in areas other than communication and the need for opportunities to receive specific production-management training in non-broadcast media. On this latter topic I will concentrate.

The controversy concerning the proper role of the university in providing vocational, practical or professional training, as opposed to a general or liberal arts education, goes back at least to the time of Aristotle. In his Politics he accurately summarized today's dilemma: "The existing practice of education is perplexing," he said. "No one knows on what principle it should proceed--should the useful in life, or should virtue, or should higher knowledge, be the aim of our training; all three opinions have been entertained. Again, about the means there is no agreement."⁷

Yet, there are several reasons why a general education--which is intended primarily for the student's self development as an individual--should be our first goal in preparing the student for employment as a professional. First, the source of all program material in radio and television broadcasting and in institutional media is, as Russell Barber said, "founded in other fields and disciplines rather than in a literature of its own."⁸ Secondly, the process of learning "to think, to evaluate, to understand, and to communicate," as the National Association of Broadcaster's Standards Committee put it three decades ago, is founded in a liberal arts education.⁹ And a third very practical reason is that studies have shown rather conclusively that media system owners and station managers prefer the broadly educated. This was found by Summers who concurred on the basis of his research that "with few exceptions, broadcasters insist that they prefer to employ men and women who have received a broad liberal education, with a thorough grounding in such fields as English and history, modern languages, the social sciences, and speech."¹⁰ Some executives would go so far as to suggest no specific training in broadcasting at all, Summers said.

Similarly, Guback showed the overall need for liberal arts education through his survey of 79 station managers.¹¹ Linton and Hyden found that station managers in the five states that they surveyed wanted more liberal education for future employees.¹² F. Virginia Howe suggested a solid foundation in the liberal arts and social sciences rather than in technical areas as a result of her Ed.D. thesis findings.¹³ Jack Bain, in his M.A. thesis, reported that the 36 managers of the nations largest clear channel radio stations who responded to his query

"were by far in favor of a liberal college preparation in comparison with vocational training."¹⁴

Other surveys of station managers and employees in the broadcasting industry have been reported by Baskette,¹⁵ Reed,¹⁶ and Starlin.¹⁷ Starlin discussed the results of a study which surveyed about 400 radio and television station managers, nearly 2,000 radio and television employees, and over 100 former employees. This study confirmed earlier findings by showing that among the educational backgrounds of those actually employed by the industry "the liberal arts field is predominant in both radio and television groups."

Blended with the study of principles, techniques and practices in media, the general education, then, will "foster an understanding of the ethical and social responsibilities of the communication specialist [who] will make the right use of [his media] knowledge and skill."¹⁸ But about that media training: Last year a survey the author conducted of all radio-television-film degree granting institutions in the United States did not reveal a single department offering a curriculum oriented primarily toward non-broadcast television or industrial media. Yet corresponding to the tightening job market in broadcasting are expanding employment opportunities in the industrial uses of media.

"In 1973, internal television programming for business and industry amounted to over 13,000 programs for a total of 3,500 hours--more than the production of the three networks that year combined."¹⁹ Three years ago the Brush Report indicated "that more than 300 corporations spent over \$500 million for program production and distribution." It is estimated that this industry has now tripled in size, surpassing the

2.5 billion dollar mark and "will continue to expand at a rate of 40% per year."²⁰ With the obvious implications of this market to college graduates, the question arises: What training should be provided to those interested in non-broadcast institutional media and how if at all, does this training differ from that for the traditional broadcasting specializations?

Using as a model the Indiana University-Purdue University academic program in non-broadcast institutional media recently developed in Indianapolis, I should like to briefly discuss these characteristics: First, that the program be founded on the study of basic communication; second, that it provide training in methods of systematically analyzing alternative approaches to meeting specific behavioral objectives, and for designing effective instructional and persuasive messages which make use of appropriate media; third, that it provide concentrated study of production principles and techniques through directed practice and drill in small-format television and synchronous sound-slide program preparation; fourth, that it progressively increase student responsibility through full production management of all aspects of planning and execution; fifth, that it provide opportunities to supplement production courses with those in administration and management, technical operations and engineering, and in performance; and finally, that it incorporate professional practices or internship opportunities for seniors in corporate or institutional settings.

At IUPUI the speech department provides two courses in basic communication which are required of all student majors, including those in telecommunications. The first core course, Communication

Performance, focuses on the verbal and nonverbal bases of oral communication. Importantly, it provides for study and practice of the problems and skills required in professions. In a sense, the course represents a "back to the basics" movement by the department. Although it considers the appropriate choices an effective communicator makes, the course focuses on delivery of messages in a variety of contemporary settings.

In the second core course, Communication Theory, the student examines the communication process. It includes a broad survey of theories which help explain human communication behavior, such as general systems theory, information theory, theories of interpersonal communication and small group communication, theories of human organizations, and theories of communication in societies or mass communication theories.

While training of the type described here would be appropriate in broadcast education as well, it is particularly so in curricula designed primarily to meet the needs of media professionals in education, industry, government, business and the professions. For institutional media is always communication oriented--it is message oriented--with over 90 percent of the programs used being produced internally for an identifiable audience.

In addition to communication courses, future job-hunters, if they are to be attractive to media department employers, need backgrounds in instructional systems design. For this reason a course entitled "Methods in Educational and Industrial Telecommunications" is an area requirement. The course helps majors gain a working understanding of how institutional

closed-circuit television, sound-slide programs and other media may be used effectively for instructing and persuading. Understanding these processes begins with a study of the findings in media effectiveness research, but the course focuses on methods of successfully completing each step in Jerrold Kemp's design model. During the semester each student works with a content specialist who has a general instructional goal. As a media specialist, it is the student's task to identify specific objectives, set the objectives behaviorally in terms of individual needs of the intended audience, select the subject content and learning experiences which are believed to be most effective and efficient while keeping in mind limitations of budget, personnel, facilities, equipment and schedules, and then test the materials on a sampling of learners. The student is encouraged to use all available human and non-human resources. The decision-making process--indeed all the activities of the course--parallel the practical problem-solving methods of institutional media.

Because of the need to learn not only about television or radio, but to be familiar with other media which might be more appropriate in the institutional setting, a reorganization of the traditional production sequence seemed necessary at Indianapolis. Rather than a single introductory production course which covers a single medium, the major requires three introductory production courses which divide early study into distinct phases common to many media. A three-hour course Visual Production Principles, for instance, deals with theory and application of methods in still photography, motion picture photography, and television camera technique. Audio Production Principles covers

independent and studio recording, then adapts the basic methods to the requirements of television, synchronous sound-slide presentations, film, and radio. Similarly, Production Planning and Writing involves analysis of common production management problems and preparation of scripts and storyboards appropriate to various media. Considerable emphasis is given in all three courses to practical and technical encountered bases of production because many of the problems encountered in relatively small media departments reach back ultimately to these principles.

After completing the introductory courses, production students concentrate on small-format television and sound-slide preparation methods, these being the most commonly used media in business and industry. Because of its complexity and requirements for precise teamwork, television is a three-semester course ending with Directing. There is a single course covering problems in Programmed Multi-Image Slide Production. As the student studies each medium, his responsibilities increase until he is in charge of all aspects of production. By this time he has learned that a lot of other people must be allowed to "do the doing" and it is up to him to tell them how to get it done.

An important provision of each course in the curriculum is that students prepare substantive materials to be placed in their professional portfolio. The graduate's materials include a series of slide displays, photographs, audio tapes, sound-slide presentations, scripts and instructional plans, videotaped programs, and other records which will be helpful in demonstrating acquired skills to the potential employer.

Although production is central to curricula in telecommunications, students need opportunities to supplement primary interests with courses

in management, technical subjects, and performance. Perhaps courses offered by other departments may be taken as electives at the school level if the student's educational strategy is planned well and early enough. Or these studies may be worked into the major through agreements with other departments and schools. In Indianapolis, for example, the Area of Telecommunications of the Indiana University School of Liberal Arts has an agreement with the Department of Electrical Engineering of the Purdue University School of Engineering and Technology, located a few hundred feet away. By accepting a selected number of each other's courses for credit, students from both schools benefit. Because the new technology and the growth of institutional media has created the need for a new type of professional--sometimes called a production engineer--this inter-school cooperation helps prepare a more marketable individual. Similarly, cooperation between communications departments and those of Business Administration (and others) may help students prepare for the turns their careers are likely to take down the road, as they move out of their first production jobs into management roles.

Lastly, the more marketable student is one with experience. Practicum courses, where students receive academic credit for practical work experience gained on campus, are helpful when listed on the resume. But better still is a professional practices program or internship which entails full-time work experience with a qualified cooperating off-campus organization. We are fortunate in Indianapolis to have a Professional Practices Office funded by the university to seek out, gather appropriate information relative to, and prescreen possible employers of student

interns. The Office also facilitates the student's formal application process and discusses the nature of the available work assignments with them.

The application process itself is an important part of the program. Like at many other institutions, the student begins career counseling during the semester prior to the desired internship. This includes information about how best to apply for a position. He or she is guided through resume development and works under direction to improve weaknesses in the portfolio. Then, with the recommendation of the faculty supervisor, the student requests a personal interview with the cooperating employer. If the employer, who has the final word, accepts the applicant, then the student may register for Professional Practices and begin the work experience. The student works full-time with the employer for one semester.

In summary, then, the most marketable telecommunications graduate is one who has received the best possible liberal arts education and whose specific telecommunications training included practical skills development in non-broadcast television and other institutional media. This person has a communications perspective of organizations, is able to identify objectives, and design strategies to meet those objectives by choosing appropriate resources; is able to accept and give directions; is hardware oriented to the new technologies but understands accepted production principles and techniques; and who has had at least some full-time experience outside of the academic setting.

END NOTES

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